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# Her Deaf Ear

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## CHARACTERS

ABIGAIL NASON, *a severe old maid.*

HELEN WEST, *her niece.*

MAID.

REGINALD BLAIR, *a wealthy young man.*

JACK GAY, *a young man not so wealthy.*

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## Costumes, Modern



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# Her Deaf Ear

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SCENE.—*A parlor, comfortably furnished. Telephone in any convenient place. Near centre of room a small table, on which is lamp, a book or two, and a skein of worsted. On the right side of table, in rocking-chair, is seated Miss NASON, knitting. HELEN is moving about the room, behind.*

MISS NASON. Do sit down, Helen. You make me as nervous as a witch fidgeting about so.

HELEN. I was only looking for something.

(*Sits in chair on right of Miss N.*)

MISS N. Don't sit on that side. You know I can't hear a sound with that ear. I believe you always get next my deaf ear just to spite me.

HEL. I beg your pardon, Aunt Nabby. I didn't think.

(*Goes to chair on left of table. Sits, crocheting.*)

MISS N. Why shouldn't you think? What have you on your mind to prevent you from remembering a thing like that? Unless, indeed, you are thinking about beaus.

HEL. I certainly wasn't.

MISS N. Is anybody coming here to-night?

HEL. I haven't asked anybody to come. Have you?

MISS N. You are trying to deceive me. You think because I am an old woman and half deaf, you can play any pranks on me that you please.

HEL. I haven't been playing any pranks.

MISS N. Haven't you asked that John Gay to come here to-night?

HEL. I didn't ask him. I only said I should be in.

MISS N. Oh, ho, miss! Then he is coming.

HEL. I didn't say —

MISS N. Humph! It's no matter what you said or didn't say. I've asked a better man myself; so it's all right.

HEL. Who is it?

MISS N. The man I've picked out for you; Reginald Blair.

HEL. That molly-coddle! I detest Reggie Blair.

MISS N. You'll get over that; and as I manage this family, I suppose I have a right to say who shall call here.

HEL. (*rising*). Very well. If Reggie Blair is coming to see you, I should only be in the way. I can go out, I suppose.

(*Crosses, so as to be on Miss N.'s right.*)

MISS N. You will stay where you are. I know what you want. You'd go over to Hettie Gray's, and telephone to John Gay to come there.

HEL. (*on deaf side*). That's a good idea; but I shouldn't think of going if he's coming here.

MISS N. What did you say?

HEL. (*going behind table, so as to be on left side of aunt*). I said I shouldn't think of going.

MISS N. Humph! I shouldn't think of having you go. (*Rising.*) You are not to leave this house to-night. If anybody comes to see you, I'll see them too. I'm going up to change my cap, and don't you stir out of this room.

(*She turns, so that her right side is toward HEL.*)

HEL. It's because somebody is coming that I'll stay to please you.

MISS N. (*turning left ear to HEL.*). What's that?

HEL. I said I'd stay to please you.

MISS N. (*turning again toward door*). You are very meek all of a sudden.

HEL. If I am meek, I don't get it from the Nason side of the family.

MISS N. (*turning*). Don't keep saying things that I can't hear. What did you say, then?

HEL. You've always told me the Nasons were all meek.

MISS N. They are; but I never know what the West half of you will do. [Exit.

HEL. I can tell you what the West half of me will do, then. It will telephone to Jack. (*She goes to telephone and takes up the receiver.*) Give me Main nine seven double four, please. (*Pause for each dash in what follows.*) — Hallo. Is that

you, Jack?—Of course 'tis I. I suppose so many girls call you up that you couldn't tell which one it was.—You silly thing! You can't send a kiss over the wire!—Do stop making that smacking noise. They'll hear at Central. Besides, I want to say something quick—I don't always say things quick either. I've a great mind not to tell you a single thing.—Well, for this one time I'll forgive you.—Why, when you come to-night I want you to get on the right side of Aunt Nabbie.—Well, if you never have, I'll tell you how to do it now. You must be sure always to be on her left side.—Ha, ha, ha! Don't make me laugh! Of course it is! Her left side *is* her right side.—You must stop —ha, ha!—making me laugh, or I can't tell you. It's a deadly secret, and she'd murder me if she knew I told you; but she's stone deaf in her right ear. You must never let her suspect you know it, for she's awfully sensitive; but if you'll get on the side that can hear, and let Reggie Blair be on the other—I didn't ask him either! You know I didn't. She did.—Don't make me laugh, I tell you. She may come in any minute. If you'll just twist the things he says a little, you can get her as mad with him as a hatter.—I'm not a sly little piece; and I think you are awfully mean to say so, when I'm doing it all for you.—Don't make that noise! I know somebody'll hear; and what good is a kiss over the telephone, anyway. Come as early as you can.—Here she comes. Good-bye.

(*She hangs up receiver and leaves telephone. Enter Miss N.*)

MISS N. Didn't I hear the telephone bell?

HEL. Did you? Perhaps your friend Reggie wanted to speak to you.

MISS N. Now, miss, you may stop being impudent. Sit down there, and listen to me. I'm not at all satisfied at the way you have been going on with that John Gay. Your father knew what he was about when he made his will.

HEL. I won't say anything against father; only I was so little when he died that he couldn't have realized that I would ever be grown up. If he had, he never would have forbidden me to marry without your consent.

MISS N. He knew that the West headstrongness in you might be too much for the Nason.

HEL. Well, if I can't marry anybody without your consent,

at least you can't make me marry anybody I don't want to. You may be sure of that.

MISS N. You obstinate thing ! I'm only considering your good. Mr. Blair will be the richest man in the county.

HEL. He isn't rich enough to buy me, even if you want me to sell myself.

MISS N. Don't talk like a silly schoolgirl. You can make up your mind to like him as well as anybody else.

HEL. If that's your idea of —

MISS N. It's my idea of common sense.

HEL. It may be the sort of sense common with you.—The doorbell rang.

(*The maid ushers in MR. BLAIR. He is in evening dress, with flower in buttonhole. His manner is rather affected.*)

MAID. Mr. Blair.

[Exit.]

HEL. Good-evening, Mr. Blair.

BLAIR. Good-evening, Miss West. I am delighted to find you in. How do you do, Miss Nason ? I am enchanted to see you looking so well.

MISS N. Good-evening, Mr. Blair. Thank you ; I am always well, I am happy to say.

BLAIR. Really you should rap on wood when you say that ! Ha ! ha !

HEL. Won't you sit down ? (*He takes chair on left of Miss N., she chair on right.*) It is very good of you to come to see Aunt Nabby.

BLAIR. I didn't come to see your aunt—er—that is, of course I came to see you both.

MISS N. (*stiffly*). I hope I am not in the way, Mr. Blair.

BLAIR. Oh, most certainly not. I always *so* enjoy your conversation, Miss Nason, but when Miss West said —

HEL. As I was saying, Mr. Blair, it is kind of you to call on her, for of course old people feel these little attentions.

BLAIR. Oh, but Miss Nason isn't so very old.

MISS N. Old ! I hope not ! (*She turns suspiciously to HEL.*) What are you saying ? Sit over there, so that I can see you without turning my back on Mr. Blair.

HEL. (*going over to L.*). I didn't suppose you would object to my saying it was kind of Mr. Blair to call.

MAID (*showing in MR. GAY*). Mr. Gay.

[Exit.]

HEL. (*going to meet him*). Good-evening, Jack. How did you happen to think of coming in to-night ?

GAY. I think about coming every night, only I don't dare to come too often.

(He goes to Miss N., and shakes hands, saying "Good-evening" to her and to BLAIR. Then sits, on right of Miss N. HEL., standing behind her aunt and BLAIR, motions to him that he is on the wrong side.)

MISS N. Helen, isn't this room rather warm?

HEL. It's suffocating. Mr. Blair, won't you open this window for me?

BLAIR. Delighted, I'm sure.

(BLAIR goes to her. She indicates a window at back of room. GAY also rises. HEL., while BLAIR is busy with the window, motions to GAY to change seats. He does not at first understand, and she touches her ear. Then he goes to place left vacant by BLAIR. During the next speech BLAIR and HEL. return from window, he taking seat on right. HEL. busies herself at back of room a moment.)

GAY. You are always so industrious, Miss Nason. I should think you would get tired of knitting.

MISS N. I should get more tired of having my hands idle.

GAY. But it is such fussy work.

BLAIR. I suppose it doesn't seem so to Miss Nason, because she does it so much better than others.

GAY. Why should you say that she doesn't do other things well?

MISS N. What's that?

GAY. It seems to me odd that Mr. Blair should think you knit well because you can't do other things well. Of course that is absurd.

BLAIR. I didn't say anything of the kind.

MISS N. I am happy to say that I do as many things well as most women of my age.

BLAIR. No one would dare to think of age in connection with Miss Nason.

GAY. What an extraordinary thing to say! Why shouldn't any one dare to think of Miss Nason's age, Mr. Blair?

BLAIR. Why, I said—I said —

MISS N. Mr. Blair seems to be much concerned about my age to-night.

BLAIR. But I didn't say anything of the kind. Don't be angry, my dear Miss Nason !

GAY. Angry ! Of course Miss Nason is not angry. She can still afford to be amused at jokes about her age.

MISS N. Of course I am not angry. I hope I am able to control my temper, even if remarks are made that are anything but polite.

BLAIR. But I haven't said anything !

GAY. You never do, Reggie, if you'll excuse my mentioning it.

BLAIR (*starting up angrily*). I shall not excuse you, Mr. Gay.

(HEL., who has been listening with evident amusement, goes to table and takes worsted. She speaks while on left of her aunt.)

HEL. I am going to ask Mr. Blair to hold my worsted, Aunt Nabby. That will give him something to do, and keep him out of mischief.

(She puts the skein over his hands, and begins to wind the worsted.)

MISS N. Be sure and wind it loose.

BLAIR. What difference does that make ?

HEL. If it is too tight it gets stringy.

GAY. Just as you are when you are tight, Reggie.

BLAIR. I don't get tight.

MISS N. Your expression doesn't seem to me to be very refined, Mr. Gay.

GAY. But the thing isn't refined, you know.

MISS N. (*turning toward BLAIR, but still with her right side toward him*). I hope your temperance principles are not loose, Mr. Blair. Helen, I believe you are getting that ball too hard.

(She rises to examine the ball of worsted. This brings her back to the audience, and her right side to GAY.)

HEL. I don't think it's tight, Aunt Nabby.

BLAIR. My temperance principles, Miss Nason, are above reproach.

MISS N. I hope they are.

GAY (*laughing, and touching his finger to his ear in pantomime*).

*mine behind the back of Miss N.). I say, Helen, we are just going it like a house afire.*

BLAIR. What singular language, Mr. Gay.

GAY. Well, why not? I'm still a bachelor, so you can't expect me to use plural language. Besides, it wouldn't be polite to the old lady you didn't come—to visit.

(Miss N., turns suddenly while he is speaking to take her seat. She starts as she hears the last words, and speaks very stiffly.)

MISS N. What did you remark, Mr. Gay?

HEL. Oh, Jack! You've spoiled everything!

GAY. I beg your pardon, Miss Nason; but I couldn't help thinking once more of the impertinence of Reggie's remark earlier in the evening. It was so absurd, as well as impolite.

MISS N. I must say I do not see the need of bringing it up again.

GAY. Why, of course you can afford to be amused, or I shouldn't have referred to it.

HEL. Oh, Jack, do be careful!

BLAIR. You both talk as if Miss Nason was deaf.

GAY. Deaf! What an absurd idea!

MISS N. Who is deaf?

GAY. Nobody but those who won't hear. It is one of the funny things that Reggie says, like his wondering if you were not out of temper.

MISS N. I am sorry, Mr. Blair, that you think my temper so bad.

BLAIR. Oh, Miss Nason, Mr. Gay misrepresented my remark. I am sure that if anybody has a good temper, you have.

(She twists her left ear around so as to hear the last words, and turns away offended.)

MISS N. Oh, I have a temper, have I?

GAY. Reggie, you are downright rude to-night. What is the matter with you?

BLAIR (becoming much excited). There is nothing the matter with me! You are trying to make me a ludicrous spectacle!

HEL. Please don't flourish about so. I can't wind this worsted if you wave your arms like a windmill.

BLAIR. But Miss Nason has misunderstood what I said.

GAY. It doesn't make things much better to say that Miss Nason is not able to understand.

BLAIR. That wasn't at all what I said !

HEL. It sounded a good deal like it.

BLAIR. I uttered something entirely different.

HEL. Do hold your arms still.

GAY. Are you sure you know what you do say, Reggie ?

BLAIR. I will thank you, Mr. Gay, not to be so familiar. Miss Nason, I beg —

GAY. Not to be so familiar, Miss Nason ! Well, that does cap the climax !

BLAIR. I tell you —

HEL. You are tangling my worsted all up !

BLAIR. Confound your worsted ! I beg your pardon, but —

HEL. (*taking it from him*). I will take good care not to ask you to do me a favor again, Mr. Blair. (*Goes to GAY*.) Do you mind holding this wool for Aunt Nabby, Jack ?

GAY. It is a pleasure for me to do anything for Miss Nason.

BLAIR. I was willing to hold it.

HEL. You said Aunt Nabby's worsted might be confounded.

MISS N. I should be sorry to have you troubled on my account, Mr. Blair.

BLAIR (*confused and half whining*). What have I done that you all walk all over me ?

GAY. Walking is such good exercise. You might try it, old fellow.

(HEL. *finishes winding, puts ball on table, and goes to R.*  
BLAIR *rises.*)

BLAIR. I think I will try it, thank you. I thought I was paying Miss West a compliment by coming, but she doesn't seem to appreciate it.

HEL. Oh, I do appreciate it, I assure you, I like to have men get into the habit of coming, against the time I am an old maid.

(BLAIR *goes to MISS N. and holds out his hand. She sees it, rises, and turns to hear his next remark.*)

BLAIR. I never could see the fun of calling on old maids. Oh! I beg your pardon, Miss Nason. I didn't mean that for you.

GAY. Upon my word I never heard such impudence!

MISS N. (*courtesying*). This old maid is your very obedient servant, Mr. Blair.

BLAIR. Oh, I shall never dare look anybody in the face again.

MISS N. I have the honor to bid you good-evening, Mr. Blair.

GAY. So long, Reggie.

HEL. Good-evening, Mr. Blair. It was so kind of you to come.

(BLAIR looks from one to another a moment; tries to speak; then rushes out of the room.)

MISS N. I never was so deceived in anybody in my life.

GAY. I think you have been deceived, indeed, Miss Nason. It is inconceivable that anybody should take advantage of your hospitality to impose on you so.

HEL. You know I never could bear him, Aunt Nabby.

MISS N. You needn't remind me of that. However, I'm done with him. I must say, Mr. Gay, that you have behaved in a most gentlemanly manner throughout this very unpleasant evening.

GAY. I have had hard work to restrain my feelings, Miss Nason. If it had been anybody but you, I should not have resented it so much.

MISS N. Humph! Don't plaster it on too thick.

GAY (*laughing*). Well, you see you are Helen's aunt.

MISS N. Humph! Perhaps you mean it. At least I will give you the benefit of the doubt. You may have her.

HEL. Oh, Aunt Nabby!

GAY (*kissing Miss N.'s hand*). At least I will mean everything I say to you for the rest of my life, Miss Nason; and I'll never say anything but good.

MISS N. I shall find ways enough to test your sincerity, I dare say. Good night. (*She goes to the door, and turns her head.*) Don't sit up late, Helen.

HEL. No, Aunt Nabby. Good-night. (*Exit Miss N.* GAY holds out his arms, and after a second of hesitation HEL.

*runs into them. He embraces her. Then she pushes him back, and holds him at arm's length.) Oh, Jack!*

GAY. What is it, darling?

HEL. Oh, don't you ever, ever, ever let Aunt Nabby find out that you knew about her deaf ear !

## CURTAIN

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